From Expert to Trusted Advisor

– the consultant role in transition

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What behaviour, competencies and mindset does the perfect consultant have – the one who manages to create maximum value for customers? That was the question 30 new graduates from Twoday discussed on the first module of their graduate programme.

It is a good question – for experienced consultants too. Customers often hire the consultant for their expertise. But they keep the consultant for the trust.

This article is about how the consultant role is changing – and why the ability to capture customer value is what sets the trusted advisor apart from the expert.

Expertise is the ticket – not the journey

Many consultants are highly skilled professionals. They know the systems, methods and technology inside out. That is a prerequisite for getting through the door. But it is rarely what makes the customer call again.

Customers do not buy a system, an analysis or a workshop. They hire a consultant to solve a concrete problem under very specific circumstances. The technical executor delivers what was ordered. The trusted advisor understands why it was ordered – and dares to ask whether it is the right thing to order at all.

At the same time, the role is under pressure. As AI makes professional knowledge and technical solutions more accessible, it becomes harder to stand out on expertise alone. What cannot be automated is the relationship and the ability to understand the customer's reality. I have written more about this in "Digitalisation and AI Are a Leadership Project".

Customer Value Interception – the core of the advisor role

At Cronquist Consult we call this ability Customer Value Interception: The ability to systematically identify, understand, create and deliver the value customers genuinely need – including needs they may

not yet be able to articulate.

It requires the consultant to get close to the customer's reality – almost like an anthropologist living among the natives for a while. Not to sell, but to understand: What is the customer really trying to get done? What is happening with the customer's customers? And what would make everyday life easier for those who will use the solution?

It sounds simple, but it is not. We all have filters that generalise, delete and distort what we hear. That is why the expert often hears what they expect – and not what the customer actually says. I have written more about this in "Customer Value as Management's Compass".

> *Customers hire the consultant for the expertise. They keep the consultant for the trust.*

Trust can almost be calculated

In the book "The Trusted Advisor", David Maister, Charles Green and Robert Galford describe trust as an equation: Credibility plus reliability plus intimacy – divided by self-orientation.

The expert typically tries to build trust by becoming even more skilled professionally. But that only lifts credibility. Reliability is about keeping your promises. Intimacy is about the customer daring to share their uncertainty and real problems. And self-orientation – the urge to be right, show off your knowledge or sell more – drags it all down. The trusted advisor works on all four.

The perfect consultant – a programme at Twoday

We started the collaboration with an international graduate programme at Visma Consulting with around 30 graduates from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. It went really well, so when Twoday was born, we were on board from the start. For three years in a row, Twoday has chosen Cronquist Consult to facilitate its graduate programme for young, talented, newly qualified people – each year with around 30 participants.

The young people have a lot to offer. They are curious, active and eager to learn – in themselves excellent prerequisites for becoming skilled consultants who are good at capturing what customers need and turning it into excellent products and services that solve concrete problems and make everyday life easier.

The programme follows a common thread from "me" to "us" to the customer and the business. In the first module, graduates work with personal leadership, psychological profiles, dilemmas and the ideal of "the perfect consultant". The second module is about teamwork and communication, with simulations of customer–consultant situations. The third module is about customer needs and trust – with real Twoday customers and cases in the training.

The first module typically starts with an inspiring talk from the company's CEO, and a former graduate who vividly shares expectations and outcomes – and gives the new group some really good advice. The foundation of the whole programme is Twoday's three core values: Drive, Heart and Adaptability.

We go in depth with the home assignment on module 2, where the intensity and difficulty of the exercises are stepped up. It is learning by doing – not a lecture about the consultant role.

After the first Nordic programme at Visma Consulting, Sabrina Andersen, HR Business Partner, highlighted that "Mads has very extensive knowledge of the subjects" and that "he delivers what was agreed on time". The latter is reliability in the trust equation – and something every consultant can learn from.

The customer as co-trainer

The most direct route to the customer's perspective is to invite the customer into the learning space. At Cepheo, real customers took part directly in the training of two Nordic consultant teams with 16 consultants each. The consultants could hear the customers directly, ask questions, test their own assumptions and reflect on their practice in light of what the customers themselves said.

The consultants tried out new interactive, customer-involving meeting methods, so that the customers became co-designers of their own product.

It takes courage to let the customer speak freely. But it is often the most critical customers who provide the most valuable learning. And this is exactly where intimacy in the trust equation arises: When the consultant listens more than he/she talks.

From me to us to the customer

The order is not accidental. A consultant who cannot listen to themselves and their own blind spots will find it hard to listen to colleagues. And a team that cannot listen to each other will find it hard to hear what the customer really values, dreams of, is dissatisfied with or wonders about.

That is why the journey from expert to trusted advisor starts with the individual. It continues in the collaboration with colleagues. And only then can you truly meet the customer as an equal sparring partner – not just as a supplier.

What characterises the trusted advisor

Behaviour, competencies and mindset:

- **Behaviour:** Listens more than he/she talks. Asks open questions before he/she presents the solution. Keeps his/her promises.
- **Competencies:** Professional depth – but also Customer Value Interception, communication and business understanding.
- **Mindset:** Curious about the customer's reality, humble about their own assumptions and focused on the customer's success rather than their own brilliance.

Three questions for the consultancy and its leadership team

Ask yourselves:

- Are our consultants hired again for their expertise – or for the trust?
- When did our consultants last meet customers in their own reality – without selling anything?
- Do we only train expertise, or also the ability to capture customer value?

Conclusion – trust is the most important deliverable

Expertise is the ticket through the door. But it is trust that gets you invited back in. The trusted advisor understands the customer's reality, dares to challenge the brief and puts the customer's success above their own.

It can be learned. It starts with personal leadership, continues in collaboration and only becomes truly strong when the consultant meets the customer – ears first.

This article builds on my LinkedIn articles "Den perfekte konsulent" (2025) and "Broen mellem det faglige og personlige lederskab" (2025).

Should your consultants become trusted advisors?

Cronquist Consult ApS develops graduates, consultants and consultant teams with a focus on personal leadership, collaboration and customer value. Read more here:
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